

# Indigenous tourism as an instrument to avoid conflicts between Arctic development and indigenous resilience

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**Abstract:** Over the last decades, tourism has experienced continued growth and deepening diversification to become one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the Arctic. As a new phenomenon, Indigenous tourism is closely linked to sustainable development and encompasses a growing number of northern indigenous peoples and specific methods of interaction with nature and society. This research aims to focus on Indigenous tourism as an effective tool for balancing emerging economies of the Arctic region and sustainable or resilient development of the Arctic aboriginal peoples who have been inhabiting this region for thousands of years. It suggests that Indigenous tourism and activities encompass several tools to prevent conflicts, reach decisions, raise environmental awareness, and teach sustainable values. This idea is relevant for all Arctic states where development is justified mainly by economic perspectives, not indigenous resilience. The topic is also appropriate for the global community because sustainable development is understood as the only possible future where people must correlate economic, environmental and social dimensions and prevent conflicts within those. The paper describes one Arctic region in the Russian Federation – the unique and intriguing Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District. The author believes that this region, with its distinct opportunities and features, is a prime example of how indigenous tourism can be used as an instrument to avoid conflicts, taking into account sustainability factors, guaranteeing the interests of the indigenous population, and expanding the tourist experience towards sustainable values.

**Keywords:** Indigenous peoples. Tourism. Arctic. Russia. Conflict prevention.

**Summary:** Concept of indigenous tourism – Main tools for conflict prevention and resolution related to tourist economic activities and Indigenous resilience – Lessons of sustainability in Indigenous tourism – Conclusion – References

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## Concept of indigenous tourism

The Arctic covers about 15 thousand km<sup>2</sup> of pristine and untouched lands and vast wilderness areas. The Arctic territories are global biodiversity reserves

and unique indigenous culture.<sup>1</sup> The natural resources in the Arctic have been used for millennia for hunting, grazing, fishing and other traditional resource use, more recently for commercial activities, for example, road construction, oil and gas development since the 1960s and tourism in the last decades.<sup>2</sup> With broadening knowledge about the High North, accessibility of its territories and increasing popularity of the Arctic over the past 15 years, more and more people want to see this region. Mass tourism in the northern destinations will inevitably change the nature and culture of Indigenous peoples and impact them environmentally, socially and economically.<sup>3</sup>

The World Tourism Organization, the Tourism Council and the Earth Council define sustainable tourism as:

Sustainable Tourism Development meets the needs of present tourists, host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.<sup>4</sup>

On the one hand, the economic potential of Arctic tourism activities is underestimated. For example, across the vast territory of the Russian North, there is a substantial imbalance between what the territory can provide and what the tourism industry can utilize.<sup>5</sup> Although the design of the tourism experience forming in the course of tourist routes has been described in some research,<sup>6</sup> recent studies pay less attention to its monetary benefits.

On the other hand, tourism in the Arctic region can cause conflicts between the economic units undertaking the tourist activities, Indigenous communities leading the traditional economic activities (reindeer herding, fishing, etc.) and the environment experiencing pressure on natural ecosystems. Thus, tourism should be organized sustainably, albeit with consideration for the environment and the traditional lifestyles of Indigenous peoples.<sup>7</sup> In this way, tourism can become the main instrument of regional economic development, in which the local community is the beneficiary but not the victim.

To target this goal the Arctic communities need to foster 'Indigenous tourism' led by Indigenous peoples and based on core principles of their worldview and

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<sup>1</sup> LUKIN, 2016a, p. 212-213.

<sup>2</sup> See: FAY & KARLSDÖTTIR, 2010; KAJAN, 2013; LOKTEV, 2015, STONEHOUSE & SNYDER, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> BARRE et al., 2016.

<sup>4</sup> SUSTAINABLE TOURISM, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> USENYUK & GOSTYAEVA, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> McCOOL & MOISEY, 2008; TUSSYADIAH, 2014; USENYUK & GOSTYAEVA, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> CHEN, 2014; HILLMER-PEGRAM, 2016; KAJAN, 2013.

attitudes towards the Arctic: compatibility and conservation; preservation of wilderness and biodiversity; sustainable use of natural resources; consumption, waste and pollution abatement; respect for local cultures; preservation of historic and scientific sites; benefits for local communities; responsibility; opportunity for the Arctic studies; safety rules.

These principles contribute to resolving all conflicts that might arise when tourist activities are going on across ancestral lands of Indigenous peoples, sacred areas, fragile environmental ecosystems, etc. They can become critical factors for fostering environmentally and socially responsible behaviors, providing particular explanations before and during tourist activities.

To exemplify and verify the concept of Indigenous tourism, the author of this paper conducted research in the territory of Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District in 2022-2023. The Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District was chosen because vulnerable Arctic ecosystems and unique traditional cultures make sustainable indigenous tourism the most preferred form of tourism in this area.<sup>8</sup> Each stage of the tourist route in the Yamal land is the platform to study traditional values, attitudes, and customs following sustainable development goals. In this way Indigenous tourism in the territories of the northern Indigenous peoples can become an effective tool for balancing the dimensions of sustainable development (economic, environmental and social).

The Arctic is considered one of the most attractive tourism destinations,<sup>9</sup> and the Yamal region is the most suitable for this. Besides, many researchers describe the dependence of tourism on climate change.<sup>10</sup> The effect of climate change on tourism is inevitable and ambiguous. On the one hand, climatic changes are assessed as increasing the attractiveness of the Arctic and making tourism more popular. On the other hand, the increasing availability of the Arctic aggravates threats to local people and the environment.

The study proves that values of sustainable development are compatible with traditional indigenous values. Traditional values have a historical background and define unwritten rules of the economic life of people and aesthetic perception of the surrounding world. They are reflected in religious beliefs, arts, traditional occupations, and folklore.<sup>11</sup> Researchers believe sustainable development goals can be more successfully achieved if based on traditional indigenous values.<sup>12</sup> We supported this conclusion with regard to legislation on sustainable development

<sup>8</sup> LOKTEV, 2015; CHEMCHIEVA, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> CHEN, 2014; USENYUK & GOSTYAEVA, 2016, p. 23-24.

<sup>10</sup> HOVELSRUD, POPPEL, van OORT & REIST, 2011; KAJAN, 2013. See also: GLADUN & AHSAN, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> ABRYUTINA, 2004; OOSTHOEK, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> BERNA GÖRMEZ & YAMAN, 2012.

enacted on the international level as well as in Russia and the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District.<sup>13</sup>

The study aims to introduce new tools of avoiding conflicts between Arctic development and Indigenous resilience via indigenous tourist activities and teaching indigenous values.

## Main tools for conflict prevention and resolution related to tourist economic activities and Indigenous resilience

Indigenous tourism stands out as a unique approach to conflict prevention and resolution, particularly in the context of Arctic development and indigenous resilience. Unlike conventional tourist routes, those proposed by Indigenous peoples are not centered on mere 'sightseeing' or 'activities'. Instead, they serve as platforms for 'lessons' and 'storytelling', through which Indigenous communities impart their values, unique culture and traditions, and traditional way of life.

The educational potential of sustainable Indigenous tourism is significantly enhanced through the rich storytelling of local traditions and the demonstration of a traditional way of life. These stories, which detail how behavior models and limitations were embodied and transmitted in the culture of Indigenous peoples, serve as valuable lessons for sustainable development for contemporary people.

Learning about sustainable development through the narrative of indigenous peoples' experiences can occur during the tourist route. Forms of teaching sustainable values during the tourist itinerary are:

- Problem-oriented situations.
- Studying traditional lifestyles and occupations.
- Storytelling.
- Participating in events and holidays.
- Lessons on sustainability.

The comparative methods applied to ethnographic materials and field projects in the Yamal District make it possible to learn more about the life of the northern Indigenous peoples (their traditions, fairy tales, and rituals) and contrast their attitudes to the economic goals of Indigenous tourism. Based on those methods, different tools can be formulated to avoid conflicts between economic, environmental, and social targets in indigenous tourism in the Arctic.

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<sup>13</sup> GLADUN & ZAKHAROVA, 2016.

### **– Tool 1. Assessment of the consequences in economic decision-making process (responsibility)**

The northern indigenous peoples adhere to their own worldviews and mythological beliefs. According to Nenets and Mansy, living in the Yamal District, the universe is a coherent system of three 'worlds': if someone is born in the upper world, someone dies in the lower one. The upper world is eternal; the middle world is for birth and death; the lower world is for the dead.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the mythology of indigenous peoples asserts the appropriateness of all living beings and human beings must not destroy the existing world order and interrelations.

Indigenous peoples are aware of the universe's interconnectedness, visible in the reindeer herding: 'Only if there are pastures, there will be deer and Khanty, Mansi, Nenets remain in the world'.<sup>15</sup> The sustainability of traditional herding is mirrored in the interdependence of animals and human life – pasture area must be proportionate to the needs of reindeer herding. In case of its reduction, the life is endangered.

The daily routine of Indigenous peoples is also a part of the universe's interconnections. Khanty, Mansy and Nenets do not plan, and their days are scheduled according to the weather. If the hunter gets up in the morning and does not feel like going anywhere, he follows his feelings and decides to do household chores, reasoning that on such a day, the game does not fly, the animal rests, and the fish does not appear.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, a crucial tool for conflict prevention could be the consideration of the feelings and awareness of Indigenous peoples. Their unique perspective, rooted in their understanding of the interconnectedness of the universe, could significantly contribute to discussions about the use of their territories for industrial development or other economic activities. By acknowledging and respecting their perspective, we can promote understanding and prevent potential conflicts.

### **Tool 2. Governance is necessary for the society and its cohesion in achieving the sustainable development (accordance)**

Indigenous traditions, knowledge, rules of behavior in the environment, and traditional skills are not just cultural elements, but also crucial contributors to sustainable development. These are deeply rooted in the cosmological and religious beliefs of the northern Indigenous peoples.<sup>17</sup> Applying indigenous traditional knowledge

<sup>14</sup> KULEMZIN, 1984, p. 170.

<sup>15</sup> MOLDANOVA & MOLDANOV, 2010, p. 15-16.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 33-34.

<sup>17</sup> INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE NORTH, 2014.

in land use, resource use, and ecological planning underscores its significance in preserving and promoting such knowledge and traditional rules for future generations.

Traditional knowledge is better transferred through ritual songs, geographical songs, religious songs, personal songs and fairy tales, which are demonstrated during Indigenous tourism.<sup>18</sup> For example, through the fairy tale of Khanty and Mansi, a child learns that fire is dangerous for the forest. Still, water is stronger than fire, and land wins over water, absorbing it, but a water monster can swallow the earth, and boys armed with bows and arrows can kill the beast. Boys can fall through the ice; the sun can melt the ice, etc. Via indigenous tourism, a visitor learns that all phenomena of nature are interconnected and to anticipate danger in some situations. Indigenous peoples recommend using a fairy tale and its considerations to avoid conflicts.

### **Tool 3. Limits and restrictions in behavior (balance)**

Indigenous peoples living in extreme northern conditions for centuries follow the rule of 'few people on a large territory', enabling them to maintain the necessary level of hunting and fishing reserves and pasture conditions. This rule is determined by the slow rate of biological resource reproduction in the North.<sup>19</sup> It is essential nowadays in the conditions of intensive industrial development of the Arctic territories.

Numerous examples illustrate traditional economic activity regulations – certain bird species are considered commercial. Religious and mythical rules protect certain species, which cannot be hunted during the nesting period.<sup>20</sup> Indigenous peoples use the resources they need for food. Greed is considered a sin that can cause the wrath of the gods. Compliance with such rules contributes to maintaining biological diversity in the northern territories. Within Indigenous tourism, a person learns how to assume definite restrictions and impose them on economic activities.

### **Tool 4. Human beings are entitled to a healthy and productive life (life in harmony with nature)**

Indigenous peoples' deep reverence for the environment is evident in their admiration for life in all its forms. For instance, there is a tradition to only shoot a beast within a certain distance. It is believed that if the beast desires to live, it will not present itself to the hunter. A perched bird may be taken, but a bird in

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<sup>18</sup> MOLDANOVA & MOLDANOV, 2010, p. 120.

<sup>19</sup> INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE NORTH, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> MOLDANOVA, 2004, p. 95.

flight is off-limits.<sup>21</sup> Those who disregard these rules of nature face retribution from the gods, emphasizing the importance of maintaining nature's equilibrium. Elaborate rituals and offerings made to the gods after a hunt serve as a reminder to Indigenous people of the weight of their actions.<sup>22</sup>

The effectiveness of traditional indigenous activities, such as those of nomads, hunters, and fishermen, hinges on their profound knowledge of animals, birds, and fish, their spatial navigation skills, and their understanding of natural and weather phenomena. This knowledge, passed down through generations, is embedded in traditional arts and everyday objects, like clothing.<sup>23</sup> The worldview of Indigenous peoples is mirrored in their art. For instance, traditional songs portray a settlement as an integral part of the surrounding environment; everything in the world is depicted as a unified whole. The most prevalent motif is a journey, which allows for the depiction of the river, snow, deer, people, historical events, and the beauty of the girls,<sup>24</sup> all of which Indigenous peoples consider indispensable.

The worldview of Indigenous peoples can be likened to a 'fishing net cast over the world'. It governs the entire universe, ensuring its coherence while being selective, flexible, and fundamentally open-ended.<sup>25</sup> This worldview fosters a society that is remarkably adaptable and resilient, a testament to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of Indigenous peoples.

#### **Tool 5. The interests of future generations (justice)**

The rituals associated with the traditional activities aim to secure the production at present and in the future.<sup>26</sup> Bones of animals are placed in a certain way so that the animal could rise again; aboriginal people often address local spirits or particular natural objects with a request for resources. This demonstrates one of the main lessons of sustainable development and conflict prevention principle – intergenerational justice.

#### **Tool 6. Rational use of resources (economy)**

Very often, Indigenous peoples show their houses and households to tourists. It is organized rationally – extended families can share small spaces without disturbing each other. Everything is multi-functional; for example, only necessary things in a reindeer herding camp can be packed and taken away quickly.

<sup>21</sup> KULEMZIN, 1984, p. 93.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 95.

<sup>23</sup> SYAZI, 2000, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> MOLDANOVA & MOLDANOV, 2010, p. 120.

<sup>25</sup> SAGALAEV, 1991, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> KULEMZIN, 1984, p. 82.

In an integrated economy, everyone is engaged in elementary and natural crafts without any specialization to provide themselves with everything necessary. These examples manifest a vital tool – rationality.

### **Tool 7. Environmental values**

Many indigenous traditions and rituals demonstrate environmental values and thoughtfulness towards any human activity. Environmental problems relevant to the Arctic require immediate and practical solutions based on a deeper understanding of their political, economic, and social background. The environmental issues of the Russian state have deep historical roots based on a ‘resource’ or ‘consumerist’ approach to economic development.<sup>27</sup> Alternatively, Indigenous environmental values are reflected in ‘nature’s laws’ – generalizations already evident in what we now know about the ecosphere, and that can be organized into a kind of informal set of laws of ecology. Ecology has not yet explicitly developed cohesive, simplifying generalizations exemplified by laws of physics or other natural studies. Still, some observations in this realm were done by famous biologist and environmentalist Barry Commoner:<sup>28</sup>

*Everything is connected to everything else.* There is one ecosphere for all living organisms, and what affects one affects all.

*Everything must go somewhere.* There is no ‘waste’ in nature and no place where things can be ‘thrown away’.

*Nature knows best.* Human beings have invented technology to improve nature, but such change in a natural system is, says Commoner, ‘likely to be detrimental to that system’.

*There is no such thing as a free lunch.* Exploitation of nature will inevitably involve converting resources from functional to useless forms.

## **Lessons of sustainability in Indigenous tourism**

Indigenous tourism contributes to the studies and educational modes of ‘sustainability’, which are considered an environmental, economic, and social goal for people to co-exist on Earth for a long time.

The traditions and mentality of the northern indigenous peoples correspond to sustainable development ideas. The indigenous traditions restricted people’s activities while using natural resources. Indigenous ancient wisdom describes the dependence of economic activities on natural conditions and gratitude towards

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<sup>27</sup> GLADUN & ZAKHAROVA, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> COMMONER, 1971.

nature. Indigenous arts glorify the beauty of nature, making people think about the importance of nature for human development.

Cultural and societal factors imply the potential social effects of tourism's contribution to social development<sup>29</sup> — tourism-related business impacts residents' traditional nomadic way of life and routine activities. Local people are not ready to experience mass tourism, and their survival (in a physical sense and cultural preservation) is still highly dependent on the environment. Indigenous peoples have certain religious restrictions they consider important, while tourists find meaningless,<sup>30</sup> discouraging local communities' positive attitudes towards tourism.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, the tourist business might be essential for maintaining traditions, holidays, and traditional crafts;<sup>32</sup> in this case, the indigenous peoples are interested in its development. Additionally, increasing tourism contributes to the quality of life in the territories, such as accessibility of communications. The objective of researchers is to improve the interactions of tourists with local communities and with operating oil and gas companies to guarantee the interests of all stakeholders in the Arctic.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

Arctic indigenous peoples – Khanty, Mansi, Nenets – have created a civilization that is the most viable and adaptive to the harsh northern conditions, climatic changes and needs of human society. The main features of the traditional economy, culture and way of life can be considered effective tools of conflict prevention and resolution conditioned by vital necessity, and tourists visiting the Arctic region have an opportunity to witness those tools in practice, visiting camps and participating in traditional occupations.

Indigenous tourism demonstrates various preventive tools in the paradigm of sustainability to avoid conflicts between environmental, economic, cultural and societal factors. Environmental factors are associated with the vulnerability of Arctic ecosystems, seasonal accessibility and severe climate.<sup>34</sup> Social factors are linked to indigenous civilization, which has existed for thousands of years and has become resilient. The economic experience of these peoples is paradoxical: the economy of northern peoples is complex (it is not specialized), extensive (intensive

<sup>29</sup> FAY & KARLSDÓTTIR, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> GRIMWOOD, 2015, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> STEWART, DRAPER & DAWSON, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> LOKTEV, 2015, p. 110.

<sup>33</sup> CHEMCHIEVA, 2015, p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> LUKIN, 2016a, p. 212-213.

use of resources in the Arctic is harmful to nature), and appropriating (while the modern economy is of a 'producer type').

A significant role in the implementation of indigenous tourism principles and tools belongs to administrative support and efficient legal regulations. In the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District, the Law "Protection of the Original Habitat and Traditional Way of Life of the Northern Indigenous Peoples in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District" was enacted in 2006. It regulates indigenous rights, regional government policy, and powers to preserve indigenous culture and the environment. In 2006, the regional legislative authority adopted a law, "Objects of Cultural Heritage (Monuments of History and Culture) of the Population Living in the Territory of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District". The law provides the basic principles and rules on protecting, preserving and using cultural objects. The indigenous culture issues are regulated by the law "Folklore of Indigenous Peoples in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District". The objective of the law is to protect the cultural diversity, rights, and identity of the indigenous population of Yamal. In addition, district programs aim to preserve Indigenous peoples' cultural heritage. For example, there was a program, "Preservation, Use, Popularization and State Protection of Cultural Heritage Objects of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District for 2009-2011". As a result of the program implementation, a system of recording cultural heritage sites was established, and measures for their use and protection were performed.

It is crucial to recognize that dramatic changes in the Arctic can both negatively and positively affect the region's development. These changes can generate threats to resilience and sustainability and can have a global impact on the traditional lifestyle and culture of the northern indigenous peoples and biodiversity. Therefore, sustainable tourism in the Arctic region should be organized based on the traditional knowledge, values, and lifestyle of the northern indigenous peoples. Their knowledge and practices, which have consistently demonstrated social responsibility, a strong commitment to nature, and integration with the natural environment, are vital for the preservation of indigenous culture.

Thus, the main goal of Indigenous tourism developing in the Arctic is to achieve resilient advantages for the local communities while preventing damage to the natural environment.

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#### **O turismo indígena como instrumento para evitar conflitos entre o desenvolvimento do Ártico e a resiliência indígena**

**Resumo:** Nas últimas décadas, o turismo tem experimentado um crescimento contínuo e uma diversificação aprofundada, tornando-se um dos setores econômicos de maior crescimento no Ártico. Como um fenômeno novo, o turismo indígena está intimamente ligado ao desenvolvimento sustentável e envolve um número crescente de povos indígenas do norte e métodos específicos de interação com a natureza e a sociedade. Esta pesquisa foca no turismo indígena como uma ferramenta eficaz para equilibrar as economias emergentes da região ártica e promover o desenvolvimento sustentável ou resiliente dos povos aborígenes que habitam esta região há milhares de anos. Sugere-se que o turismo

indígena e suas atividades envolvem várias ferramentas para prevenir conflitos, alcançar decisões, aumentar a conscientização ambiental e ensinar valores sustentáveis. Essa ideia é relevante para todos os estados árticos, onde o desenvolvimento é justificado principalmente por perspectivas econômicas e não pela resiliência indígena. O tema também é apropriado para a comunidade global, pois o desenvolvimento sustentável é entendido como o único futuro possível, no qual as pessoas devem correlacionar as dimensões econômica, ambiental e social e prevenir conflitos entre elas. O artigo descreve uma região do Ártico na Federação Russa — o único e intrigante Distrito Autônomo de Yamalo-Nenets. A autora acredita que essa região, com suas distintas oportunidades e características, é um exemplo emblemático de como o turismo indígena pode ser usado como instrumento para evitar conflitos, levando em consideração fatores de sustentabilidade, garantindo os interesses da população indígena e expandindo a experiência turística para valores sustentáveis.

**Palavras-chave:** Povos indígenas. Turismo. Ártico. Rússia. Prevenção de conflitos.

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